

ARTICLE

Foucault Among the Classicists, Again

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ABSTRACT: Foucault's posthumously-published late work on *epimeleia heautou* might inaugurate a new partnership between classicists and Foucault. This work, however, has been misconstrued in recent classical scholarship, an important instance of which I consider here. I remedy the errors of one of Foucault's classical interpreters; diagnose the reasons for the errors; and briefly suggest the transformative potential of Foucault's work for students of antiquity.

Keywords: Foucault, antiquity, care of the self; classics; ancient philosophy.

1.

Arnold Davidson has lamented philosophers' and classicists' failure to embrace the "transformative potential" of Foucault's late work on the "care of the self:"

...this transformative potential has been obscured for philosophy by a way of thinking about and writing the history of ethics that passes over the very domain that Foucault demarcated as ethics...and this potential has been further darkened in the discussions of some classicists who, to give only a partial caricature, have been so taken with tired and tiresome debates about whether Foucault knew enough Greek and Latin to legitimize his readings of the texts of classical and late antiquity that they have lost sight of his most basic aims.¹

There are exceptions to this indictment, to be sure, and Davidson's lament concedes as much. In Anglophone classical scholarship David Halperin, Martha Nussbaum, and Paul Allen Miller—to name but three—have all shown what wonderfully productive results can follow from a critical but sympathetic reading of Foucault. Davidson's own work on Foucault gives careful, considered attention to Francophone classical scholarship, especially Veyne and Vernant. Nor, it should be said, were Foucault's classicist critics only concerned with his philological skills.²

¹ Arnold Davidson, "Ethics as ascetics: Foucault, the history of ethics, and ancient thought," in Gary Gutting (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 115-140, here at 115-6.

² See especially the wide-ranging essays in David H. J. Larmour, Paul Allen Miller, & Charles Platter (eds.), *Rethinking Sexuality: Foucault and Classical Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

Davidson's lament was issued over fifteen years ago, but with the posthumous publication, in 2005, of Foucault's *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*—lectures delivered at the Collège de France in 1982, two years before his death—there is reason to be optimistic that it will soon lose its grip. *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* sees Foucault working closely, and at great length, with a range of ancient material, and sees him treating with a richness and detail, arguments that received rather telegraphic mention in the second and third volumes of *The History of Sexuality*. (The soon-to-be-published *Le courage de la vérité* pursues its arguments about ancient Cynicism in this same detailed manner.) *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, therefore offers classicists not only another occasion to discover the “transformative potential” of Foucault's work, but perhaps a more salubrious one—for two reasons: First, the form of the posthumous work is more congenial to what we might think of as classicists' methodological temperament; and, second, the broader intellectual climate might be simply more congenial to seeing Foucault as an ally.

The early reception of this late work, however, still shows considerable misunderstanding. In this short piece, I pursue three aims—two central and one subsidiary. First, I will remedy the errors that have marred the reception of Foucault's late work; second, I will briefly diagnose why such errors might have been made; and, third, in pursuing the first two aims, I hope to show what Davidson calls Foucault's “most basic aims.” In turn this will allow classicists to investigate Foucault's late work in novel ways. My focus in this piece is on James Porter, whose reading of Foucault's late work—articulated in two very similar articles—makes a series of illustrative mistakes.³ Porter is by no means alone in making these mistakes, but deserves special treatment for several reasons: First, he has made so many exceptional contributions to classical scholarship that his verdict on Foucault—coupled with the implicit endorsement of the essays' prominent places of publication—may discourage classicists from giving Foucault the critical attention he deserves. Second, Porter's articles bring a number of related—and more fundamental—mistakes together in one place. So, instead of rectifying one commentator's error here, another commentator's error there, I focus on Porter alone.⁴ In remedying his bundle of related mistakes, I will have cleared away, root and branch, a misunderstanding that may impede productively critical encounters with Foucault.

³ James Porter, “Foucault's Ascetic Ancients,” *Phoenix* 59. 1/2 (Spring / Summer 2005), 121–132; James Porter, “Foucault's Antiquity,” in Charles Martindale and Richard Thomas (eds.), *Classics and the Uses of Reception* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing), 168–179. I do not deny that there is some difference in emphasis in the two articles, but I don't think that difference affects the argument of the essay.

⁴ So, for example, the editors' introduction to the otherwise marvelous *Seneca and the Self* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009, 4–5) inexplicably says “...Foucault rightly proposed that to know was in antiquity as much a spiritual as an epistemological project. One could not know without self-knowledge, and the *gnôthi seauton* preceded all correct judgment on the world around one.” The first sentence is correct, but the entire point of *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* is to counteract the privilege accorded the *gnôthi seauton*. It wasn't self-knowledge but self-care that “preceded all correct judgment on the world.” Foucault could not be more explicit on this point. He, of course, does not deny *gnôthi seauton* a place in ancient spiritual practices. He only denies that it was prior to self-care.

2.

I begin by quoting two selections from the opening paragraphs of Porter's articles. The first selection identifies the project Porter takes Foucault's late work to pursue; the second gives a sense of how viable Porter thinks that project is. After the two quotations, I offer my own remarks. First, Porter on Foucault's project:

Self-fashioning is the contemporary and attractive idea, most recently promoted by Foucault, that subjects are not found in the world but are invented, that they can take possession of their fabricated lives by becoming their own authors, which is to say by applying their own agency to themselves and by giving shape to their lives, thus affirming their (fictive, constructed, self-fashioned) selves through what is, in the final analysis, an aesthetic practice of self-making and sublimation... And on the Foucauldian theory, the way forward to a new, daring, and postmodern form of subjectivity is by way of a return to what is held to be the classical model of self-production, the Greek and then Roman 'art of life' (*technê tou biou*), which is the art of "exercising a perfect mastery over oneself" —in other words (which are Foucault's), an "aesthetics [and 'ascetics'] of existence," freely constructed within a system of relations of power that are enabling and constraining at one and the same time.⁵

Now, Porter on its viability:

As [the paragraph quoted above] ought to make plain, the promissory note of self-fashioning is a tall order indeed. It is also (I believe) a barely coherent concept that in Foucault's hands probably tries to explain too much all at once: pagan and postmodern subjectivities; the contingency of all history; historical change, conceived as rupture (by claiming that contingency somehow releases subjects from necessity); the artfulness of identity (which leaves wide open the question of how to decide what kind or genre of art identity is meant to embody); the history of sexuality and the history of subjectivity (while often leaving uncertain which of these two histories is in focus at any given moment); and so on.⁶

I take the paragraphs in reverse order and begin by suggesting that it is worth pausing over the list that occupies the majority of the second. This is the list of all that Porter thinks "self-fashioning," "in Foucault's hands," explains. Slightly edited, here is the list: pagan and postmodern subjectivities; the contingency of all history; historical change; the artfulness of identity; the history of sexuality; the history of subjectivity. This is a formidable list. Any one item on its own seems like a lot (the contingency of *all* history?). If it is accurate, then we might be surprised that Foucault made such a claim on self-fashioning's behalf and deeply skeptical that he could make good on it.

Porter does not direct the reader to a place in Foucault's work in which such a claim is made. This is unfortunate, since it leaves the reader with the distinct impression that Foucault actually does make such a claim on behalf of "self-fashioning." But one must remember, however, that this list is Porter's creation. Foucault never says anything like it. Nor does he intimate anything similar. What could it even mean to think that "self-fashioning" "explains" the

⁵ Porter, "Foucault's Antiquity," 169. The text also appears in Porter, "Foucault's Ascetic Ancients," 121, though "promoted by Foucault" reads "largely inspired by Michel Foucault."

⁶ Porter, "Foucault's Antiquity," 169, identical to Porter "Foucault's Ascetic Ancients," 121.

“contingency of all history”? Foucault might well talk about “self-fashioning” and “contingency,” but does he really think the former *explains* the latter?

Porter might point to the qualifier “probably” in the first sentence above: “...a barely coherent concept that in Foucault’s hands *probably* tries to explain too much all at once....”⁷ But this is unfair to Foucault. Either Foucault claims that “self-fashioning” explains all that Porter says it explains, in which case Porter should tell us where in Foucault’s work we might find Foucault saying as much; or Foucault does not claim that “self-fashioning” explains all that Porter says it explains, in which case Porter should focus his attention on the role self-fashioning does play in the late work.

This makes a good point of transition back to the first selection, since it shows how Porter has subtly shifted the conceptual territory on which he confronts Foucault. I begin by noting that Porter takes Foucault to be pursuing a project that belongs to the rubric “self-fashioning.” This term, ‘self-fashioning’, does considerable argumentative work for Porter—a fact to which I will return shortly. However, it is worth noting that what actually interests Foucault in the third volume of *The History of Sexuality* and *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, is “self-care.” The phrase “care of the self” (*epimeleia heautou*) appears everywhere in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*. “Self-fashioning,” by contrast, appears not a single time in either work.

Why, then, would Porter think that Foucault’s project is a project of “self-fashioning,” given the overwhelming evidence to the contrary? I suggest an answer below. But for the moment I suggest that perhaps Porter actually thinks the two, self-fashioning and self-care, are identical. Very well, but this is by no means obvious and I think it would come as quite a surprise to those familiar with self-fashioning through works like Greenblatt’s *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*, to hear that the ancients were engaged in pretty much the same project.⁸ What is Porter’s argument for the equivalence? He offers only these two footnotes: first, “Foucault is unafraid to render ‘*culture de soi*’ with ‘*Selbstbildung*’” and, second, “The two terms—‘self-fashioning’ and ‘care of the self’—can... be interchangeable in [Foucault’s] writings, one implying the other... to the extent that both imply *un travail de soi sur soi*, a working on the self by the self.”⁹

But Porter’s footnotes are not on point. I begin with the first. It most certainly does not establish “self-care” and “self-fashioning” are identical. All it establishes is that Foucault thinks that *culture de soi* is aptly rendered in German, with *Selbstbildung*. Remember, though, that Foucault is not interested, primarily, in *culture de soi*. He is interested in *souci de soi*—look again the subtitle of the third volume of *The History of Sexuality* or virtually any page of *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*. The only way Porter’s footnote could make any sense is through an elaborate series of equivalences between *Souci de soi*, *Culture de soi*, *Selbstbildung*, and self-fashioning, but nowhere in the text does Foucault suggest anything like this. It is also worth

⁷ Ibid, my italics.

⁸ Porter actually mentions Greenblatt alongside Butler, Rorty, and Nehamas, which, I think, just shows how widely the net of his indictment is cast. See Porter, “Foucault’s Ascetic Ancients,” 123.

⁹ The first comes from Porter, “Foucault’s Ascetic Ancients,” 121, the second from Porter, “Foucault’s Ascetic Ancients,” 128. The sentence to which the first is appended is also present in Porter, “Foucault’s Antiquity,” 169; the sentence to which the second is appended is not present in Porter “Foucault’s Antiquity.”

noting that Foucault mentions *Selbstbildung* exactly once in roughly 800 pages of text.¹⁰ If, as Porter's footnote suggests, Foucault was so "unafraid" of the term, why use it only once?

What about the second footnote? That too is inaccurate. Porter presents no evidence that the two terms: 'self-fashioning' and 'care of the self' are used interchangeably. In fact, the footnote turns on an argumentative sleight of hand. Porter *says* the terms are interchangeable, because he has decided that both "imply... a working on the self by the self." This argument is not sound. Even if both terms implied *un travail de soi sur soi*, it would still not establish their identity, any more than establishing that materialism and psychoanalysis were identical because both "imply" a certain hermeneutic of suspicion. Nor—and this is the important point—would it establish that Foucault has in mind anything like the "self-fashioning" that Porter understands as the "the contemporary and attractive idea, most recently promoted by Foucault, that subjects are not found in the world but are invented..." That is, even if we were to say that "self-fashioning" is a good English placeholder for *epimeleia heautou*, this would not entail that this use of self-fashioning (as a placeholder for the Greek phrase) means anything like what it does in the quotation three lines above: a kind of self-creation, free from all forms of necessity and constraint.¹¹

So why does Porter elide the distinction between "self-care" and "self-fashioning"? I think the answer must be something like the following.¹² By equating "self-care" and "self-fashioning" Porter is able to lump Foucault in with what he takes to be a fairly unworthy intellectual "trend"—the "trend," that is, of "self-fashioning." He says that Foucault's work in *The History of Sexuality*—the third volume of which, remember, explicitly signals its interest in self-care, not self-fashioning—has had the following effect:

[it] has given credence if not the full impetus, to a *trend* in scholarship that has celebrated the unqualified powers of self-making, self-fashioning, and self-performance. This "affirmationist" tendency celebrates the vital processes of the production of subjectivities... while eschewing its negative downsides. Its main exponents in philosophy are Judith Butler, Richard Rorty, and Alexander Nehamas—perhaps not coincidentally, all three of these American, possibly reflecting a prototypically American ideal of self-fulfillment and self-realization... the contemporary academy has given rise to a "Foucault-effect" that has taken on a life of its own—in different flavors, to be sure, but more or less reducible to the proposition [that] subjects / sexuality are culturally constructed, not naturally given.¹³

I submit that this description is a deeply dismissive assessment of the projects pursued by those taken to travel following in Foucault's intellectual wake—Butler, Rorty, and Nehamas.

¹⁰ The combined length of the third volume of *The History of Sexuality* and *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*.

¹¹ Thus I find perfectly unproblematic Paul Allen Miller's excellent "The Art of Self-Fashioning, or Foucault on Plato and Derrida" (*Foucault Studies* 2 [2005], 54-74) for the simple reason that "self-fashioning"—in the article's title and in its text—never departs from the practice Foucault took it to be. It never, that is, becomes anything other than what Foucault describes as *epimeleia heautou* and certainly never gets distorted the way it does in Porter's articles. Though Miller's concerns are orthogonal to my own, he is scrupulously attentive to the details of Foucault's project.

¹² Porter, "Foucault's Ascetic Ancients," 126.

¹³ Porter, "Foucault's Ascetic Ancients," 123, identical to Porter, "Foucault's Antiquity," 171; my italics.

Those interested in self-fashioning are somehow intellectually disingenuous—they celebrate the “unqualified powers” of self-fashioning, but conveniently “eschew[] its negative downsides.” The adjective “unqualified” sounds like a reproach, suggesting as it does that these “self-fashioners” wrongly imagine that subjects are *in no way* bound from without. The same goes for the language of “different flavors,” as if the differences between Butler and Rorty—(of all people (sic)!)—were not unlike the differences between types of ice cream. It also goes for the language of “more or less reducible to the proposition [that] subjects/sexuality are culturally constructed,” as if that proposition, at the end of the day, were *all* Butler, Rorty, and Nehamas wanted to establish.

We can now see why Porter might have ignored the obvious difference between self-care and self-fashioning. Put simply, it is an enormously easy way to discredit a project one does not like. We have already seen that Porter does not like Foucault’s project. I think that much was evident in his description of self-fashioning as a “barely coherent concept... in Foucault’s hands,” quoted earlier. Now Foucault stands arraigned not only on the basis of his work, but also on these alleged—and rather “trendy”—followers to boot.

I admit that this cannot be the entire explanation for Porter’s elision of the difference between self-fashioning and self-care, because Porter also claims that Butler, Rorty, and Nehamas *distort* an important Foucauldian insight in their championing of self-fashioning. They are, he wants to say, somehow also *bad* readers of Foucault, since they have missed all Foucault’s warnings against a “liberationist theology of the subject.” There are two things to say about this. First, there is absolutely no way in which any of the three has missed these warnings. Rorty makes this especially clear in his review of Foucault’s *Power/Knowledge*: “Foucault is hoping finally to debunk the ever-recurring Rousseauistic notion that once we get the nasty old social pressures off our backs we shall be good and wise and brave.”¹⁴ Second, this just makes Porter’s take on Foucault even more confused. On the one hand, Porter says that self-fashioning is a the “contemporary and attractive idea... *promoted* by Foucault” and developed by Butler, Rorty, and Nehamas. On the other, he takes them to be betraying Foucault by (wrongly) suggesting that they have ignored Foucault’s warnings. So, is Foucault a self-fashioner or a critic of liberationist theology? It is perfectly open to Porter to answer “Both,” and then go on to show us how, but he does not. My point is that this failure allows him to have it both ways, denigrating Foucault by association with something he takes to be disreputable, while at the same time denigrating Butler, Rorty, and Nehamas for misreading Foucault.

3.

Thus far we have established that Porter offers no argument for thinking that self-care and self-fashioning are identical. We have yet to let Foucault actually describe what he takes this practice of *epimeleia heautou* to involve. It is somewhat difficult to do so, because Foucault articulates the practice in a number of different ways, albeit never in the way Porter would have it. Foucault does offer this somewhat programmatic description at the beginning of the Collège de France lectures, and I want to cite it at some length. In doing so I have two aims: First,

¹⁴ Richard Rorty, “Beyond Nietzsche and Marx,” *The London Review of Books*; February 19, (1981), 5-6.

I want to use the description as a way of underscoring how seriously Porter misrepresents Foucault; Second, I want to use the description as a point of departure for my own remarks about Foucault's project.

"This notion of *epimeleia heautou*," says Foucault in the first lecture of the course, is marked by three features:

First, the theme of a general standpoint, of a certain way of considering things, of behaving in the world, undertaking action, and having relations with other people. The *epimeleia heautou* is an attitude towards the self, others, and the world; second, the *epimeleia heautou* is also a certain form of attention, of looking. Being concerned about oneself implies that we look away from the outside... that we... convert our looking from the outside... towards "oneself." The care of the self implies a certain way of attending to what we think and what takes place in our thought. Third, the notion of *epimeleia* does not merely designate this general attitude or this form of attention turned on the self. The *epimeleia* also always designates a number of actions exercised on the self by the self, actions by which one takes responsibility for oneself and by which one changes, purifies, transforms, and transfigures oneself.¹⁵

Somewhat schematically, then, we can say that the care of the self involves a "general standpoint," a "form of attention," and a set of "exercises on the self." I now briefly take up each in turn.

By "general standpoint" Foucault has in mind two distinct ideas. The first is relatively abstract. It is meant to capture the way in which *epimeleia heautou* is supposed to be a comprehensive, totalizing undertaking. It involves, as Foucault's own gloss makes clear, an attitude—not merely toward oneself, but toward "others and the world." This triad—self, others, world—is meant to be exhaustive. It is meant to signal how *epimeleia heautou* shapes a subject's relationship to everything—herself, those with whom she comes into contact, and the objects of the world. This she is supposed to do for the entire course of her life. The practice of *epimeleia heautou* is, Foucault's says, "coextensive" with a human life.¹⁶

The second distinct idea under the rubric of "general standpoint" is more specific and basically involves basically, swapping the lexical order of two maxims from antiquity—"care for oneself" and "know oneself." It is the second of these two maxims, Foucault claims, that is typically taken to be lexically prior. Foucault argues throughout *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* that this is incorrect. The first had priority in antiquity, and our understanding of antiquity generally—and ancient philosophy particularly—will be hamstrung until that maxim, "care for oneself," is accorded the status the ancients gave it. Arnold Davidson puts Foucault's point like this: "Beginning with his very first lecture of January 6, 1982, Foucault aims to unsettle a dominant way of reading the history of ancient philosophy. Rather than isolating the Delphic prescription *gnôthi seauton* (know yourself) as the founding formula of the history of

¹⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France*, edited by Frédéric Gros, translated by Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 10-11.

¹⁶ It is not exactly true that *all* practices of self-care are co-extensive with an entire human life. Foucault in fact takes some pains to distinguish those that make care co-extensive from those that seems to make care the province of late adulthood only. See Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 81-106.

philosophy, Foucault insists... that the rule ‘know yourself’ should be understood as being formulated in a ‘kind of subordination’ to the precept of the care of the self.”¹⁷ This phrase “kind of subordination” is not an entirely happy one, and Foucault, to his discredit, does not make the precise structure of that subordination clear. Foucault’s larger point seems entirely straightforward: in antiquity, “care for oneself” had lexical priority over all other maxims, including *gnôthi seauton*, and, therefore frames the “general standpoint” within which a subject carries out all her other practices.

By “form of attention”—the second feature of *epimeleia heautou*—Foucault has in mind several different ideas. On the one hand, by saying that *epimeleia heautou* involves a form of attention Foucault wants to highlight the kind of dutiful mindfulness that needs to direct the project for it to be successful. This mindfulness sometimes involves “attention” in a rather literal sense—self-care requires scrupulous listening to and memorization of the teachings of the wise. Other times this mindfulness involves “attention” in a more metaphorical sense—the claims of self-care are constantly threatened by the distractions of social space that it takes considerable effort to persist in honoring them.¹⁸

By “form of attention,” however, Foucault also means to express the idea that caring for oneself involves regarding all one’s mental representations in a particular way. Just what this “particular way” amounts to will differ in particular instances. Foucault shows, for example, how Stoics and early Christians each had somewhat specific recommendations for *how* those trying to care for themselves ought to regard the welter of representations coming before the mind. Foucault’s point is that all those committed to *epimeleia heautou* view the proper relation between a subject and this welter of representations as essentially *negative*. That is, caring for oneself as a “form of attention” involves a kind of resistance, a kind of negativity towards or denial of the immediate claim that representations have on the mind.

By “exercises on the self” Foucault intends to capture the idea that caring for oneself is a kind of achievement and not a natural fact, a point that can be expressed by returning to the two points above. That is to say, *epimeleia heautou*—coming to make caring for oneself coextensive with one’s life, coming to regard all one’s representations in a particular way—is not something that the human being does “just by showing up.” The default mode of human life, we might say, is one of utter un-care. It is only through a regimen of exercises—some intellectual, some physical, and some dietetic—that the human being achieves this right kind of relation to herself, others, and the world. This is why Foucault speaks, in the quote above, of the need for the subject to “transform” herself. Absent, such a transformation—a transformation made possible by exercises—the subject’s life will not be a cared-for one.

We now have in view the three defining features of *epimeleia heautou* in view. But we have left untouched what we might call the final end of *epimeleia heautou*. For what reason, that is, are we enjoined to assume a “general standpoint,” to cultivate a “form of attention,” and to practice “spiritual exercises?” Foucault could not be clearer on this point: the final end of *epimeleia heautou* is the reception of truth. That is, a subject who does not transform herself in the way *epimeleia* demands is simply not allowed any access to the truth. The mere subject

¹⁷ Arnold Davidson, “Introduction,” in Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, xx.

¹⁸ See Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 221-2, 336-51.

—the subject *as such* or the un-cared for subject—“does not have right of access to the truth and is not capable of having access to the truth... for the subject to have right of access to the truth he must be changed, transformed, shifted...” Put simply, *epimeleia* is the “condition of access to truth.”¹⁹

This, Foucault claims, ought to strike post-Cartesians as a perverse idea. Foucault takes Descartes to have severed the link between “truth” and the “condition of the subject.” Truth requires knowledge and knowledge alone. There is no need for the subject to cultivate a “form of attention” or to practice “exercises” with the aim of “transforming” himself. The subject can be in any “spiritual” state—cared or uncared, it does not matter. If he knows the truth, he knows the truth; if not, not. The post-Cartesian subject “can recognize the truth and have access to it in himself and solely through his activity of knowing, without anything else being demanded of him and without him having to change or alter his being as subject.”²⁰ The post-Cartesian subject does, of course, not have access to the truth *merely* by showing up. He needs to have studied, to have mastered various techniques. Foucault’s point is that these conditions are both minimal and external to the subject. This post-Cartesian subject emphatically does not need to do anything himself beyond normal exertion to have access to the truth. He most certainly does not need to transform himself in the way *epimeleia* demands.

To return now to Porter, we can begin by noting that nowhere in either article is any attention paid to this central claim about the relationship between *epimeleia* and the subject’s preparation for truth. The word “truth” appears once in Porter’s text, but in a wholly unrelated context. This is almost inexplicable. It is not the case that Foucault’s claim—about *epimeleia* and truth—is somehow hidden. The entire first two lectures are devoted to the subject and this problem structures nearly every single page. Earlier I charged Porter with having wholly mistaken Foucault’s project—he took the “care of the self” to be identical to the “fashioning of the self” when it is most certainly not. We can now renew that charge with added emphasis, since Porter’s mistake has occluded the entire issue of *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*. That is, if Porter had merely erred by insisting that self-care be equated with “self-fashioning,” the damage would have been severe but not irreparable. But when one looks in vain for any mention of “truth” and the “subject’s access to truth” in Porter’s articles, we must say that Foucault has been badly misconstrued.²¹

4.

Foucault warned his readers against this misunderstanding. Consider the famous exchange between Foucault and his interviewers Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow:

Interviewers:

But isn’t this Greek concern with the self [*epimeleia heautou*] just a very early version of our self-absorption...?

Foucault:

¹⁹ Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 15, 29.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

²¹ This, though, is not to say that Foucault’s talk of “truth” is entirely unproblematic.

You have a certain number of themes... which indicate to you that in a culture to which we owe a number of our most important constant moral elements [Greek culture], there was a practice of the self, a conception of the self, very different from our present culture of the self. In the Californian cult of the self, one is supposed to discover one's true self, to separate it from that which might obscure or alienate it, to decipher its truth thanks to psychological or psychoanalytic science, which is supposed to tell you what your true self is. Therefore, not only do I not identify this ancient culture of the self with what you might call the Californian cult of the self, I think they are diametrically opposed.²²

We might understand the interviewers' question as not unlike Porter's position, even if the literal formulations are slightly different. The interviewers take Foucault's *epimeleia heautou* to be comparable to a "Californian" form of narcissism. Porter does not use the language of narcissism, but recall that he takes Foucault's work to be part of a "trend in scholarship that has celebrated the unqualified powers of self-making, self-fashioning, and self-performance. This 'affirmationist' tendency celebrates the vital processes of the production of subjectivities... while eschewing its negative downsides." Porter's Foucault, then, sounds very much like the interviewers' narcissist, both in the thrall of individual selves and acts of self-making, free from any form of necessity or constraint.

If this were the only place Foucault had refuted this confusion of self-fashioning and self-care, Porter might be forgiven. But it is not and, at the risk of laboring the point, I want to turn to another moment when Foucault takes pains to head off this very confusion. We need look no further than the first lecture in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*. There Foucault acknowledges that formulations like "caring for oneself," "taking care of the self," withdrawing into oneself" and others might "dissuade[] us... from giving any positive value to all these expressions, precepts, and rules [those associated with *epimeleia heautou*], and above all from making them the basis of a morality. All these injunctions to exalt oneself, to devote oneself to oneself, to turn in on oneself, to offer service to oneself, sound to our ears rather like—what? Like... a sort of moral dandyism, the assertion-challenge of a fixed aesthetic and individual stage."²³ Now unlike the answer to the interviewers above, Foucault does not here explicitly refute what we might call the "dandyism" charge by claiming that *epimeleia heautou* and dandyism are diametrically opposed. However, the structure of this passage in the lecture certainly suggests that to understand *epimeleia heautou* as a form of dandyism is to commit a serious error. Dandyism—unlike *epimeleia heautou*—is *not* a practice that prepares a subject for the truth; it is a practice that prepares a subject to go for a stroll.

Still, it must be said that some of Foucault's readers have sensed an element of dandyism in Foucault's work and they deserve a hearing. Here is Pierre Hadot, perhaps Foucault's best reader, offering these critical comments in the course of an otherwise very sympathetic assessment of Foucault's work on antiquity:

What I am afraid of is that, by focusing his interpretation on the culture of the self, the care of the self, and the conversion toward the self—more generally, by defining his ethical

²² Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress," in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* (New York: New Press, 1997), 253-280, here at 271.

²³ Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 12.

model as an aesthetics of existence—Foucault is propounding a culture of the self which is too aesthetic. In other words, this may be a new form of Dandyism, late twentieth-century style.²⁴

I think it is best to simply acknowledge that there are formulations in Foucault's work that invite such a reading. These formulations, it must be said, are emphatically *not* present in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, but they do appear, for instance, in the very same interview I cited above. At one point Foucault asks, "couldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object but not our life?"²⁵ This, of course, makes Foucault sound like Baudelaire and there is no point in denying that. But it is worth repeating what we observed above,—namely, that these formulations are entirely absent from *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, and thus make for rather scanty evidence with which to reproach Foucault.²⁶

It is, however, also clear that Foucault and Hadot ultimately have different understandings of *epimeleia heautou*. These differences will always make Foucault's ancients seem dandyish to Hadot. Arnold Davidson has elegantly parsed Hadot's critique:

One way of describing Hadot's misgivings about Foucault's interpretation of ancient spiritual exercises is to say that Foucault not only gave a too narrow construal of ancient ethics, but that he limited the "care of the self" to ethics alone. Foucault made no place for that cosmic consciousness... that was so important to the way in which the ancient philosopher viewed his relation to the world. By not attending to that aspect of the care of the self that places the self within a cosmic dimension, whereby the self, in becoming aware of its belonging to the cosmic Whole, thus transforms itself, Foucault was not able to see the full scope of spiritual exercises, that physics (and logic), as much as ethics, aimed at self-transformation.²⁷

The key sentence is this last one, which suggests that a complete account of *epimeleia heautou* needs to attend to the way—bizarre as it may sound—physics and logic were themselves practices of self-care. Foucault, it seems, never came to be convinced of this, and this means that Hadot would always find Foucault's understanding of *epimeleia* too cramped. This may be what leads him to suggest that Foucault's "culture of the self" is too aesthetic. We can, though, agree with Hadot that Foucault's understanding of *epimeleia* is too cramped, and neglects important domains of spiritual practice, and yet resist the suggestion that Foucault's

²⁴ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, edited by Arnold Davidson, translated by Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 211.

²⁵ Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress," 261.

²⁶ Or, equally, rather scant evidence with which to praise him, as Alexander Nehamas does—quite wrongly, in my view—in his otherwise wonderful *Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). Returning for a moment to Porter, he actually says that Hadot's criticism of Foucault is misplaced; see Porter, "Foucault's Ascetic Ancients," 124, fn. 13. I cannot understand why he says this, because all his remarks about self-fashioning would incline me to believe that he thinks Hadot's criticism are on target.

²⁷ Arnold Davidson, "Introduction," in Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 24-5.

ancients are too aesthetic. Nothing, I dare say, in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* suggests that *Epimeleia* is always a matter of training, exercise, paring-away.

Indeed, when Foucault provocatively suggests making human life, like a lamp or a house, into a work of art, he has in mind an artistic practice ordered around paring-away. In so doing he shows himself quite close to Hadot. That is, for both Foucault and Hadot the governing artistic practice for transforming a human life into a work of art is something like sculpture, not painting.²⁸ It is by paring-away, reducing, and eliminating (all sculptural processes) that the human life becomes an “art object,” and not, as Porter implicitly suggests, by adding, developing, and expressing. Transformation-by-addition probably is a fair description of the painterly, Greenblattian self-fashioning that Porter is keen to foist upon Foucault, but it is not at all what Foucault or Hadot—with their picture of *epimeleia* as the imposition of order on the soul—has in mind.

5.

Thus far I have spoken of Foucault’s late work on “antiquity.” To do so is obviously to speak very loosely. Foucault himself is prone, at times, to speak in this way, and Porter is justified in criticizing him on that score. But even here, when Porter’s criticism is on roughly the right track, it is formulated in a manner that cannot go uncorrected. In this final section I look, briefly, at just how under-historicized Foucault’s project is and how seriously this hobbles his work.

There is no denying that Foucault, at times, speaks of “antiquity” as if it were an undifferentiated mass, every moment of which was committed to *epimeleia*: This sample is representative of Foucault in his relatively un-historicized mode:

Throughout the long summer of Hellenistic and Roman thought, the exhortation to care for oneself became so widespread that it became, I think, a truly general cultural phenomenon. What I would like to show you... is this history that made this general cultural phenomenon (this exhortation, this general acceptance of the principle that one should take care of oneself) both a general cultural phenomenon peculiar to Hellenistic and Roman society (anyway, to its elite), and at the same time an event in thought.²⁹

The talk of the “long summer” and the repeated use of the adjective “general” is, admittedly, distressing, and it sounds like Foucault is surveying the landscape of “antiquity” from a high-altitude indeed. So high an altitude, in fact, that he might have been unable to see the finely

²⁸ See Hadot, 102 for brief, illuminating discussion of the distinction between painting and sculpture in antiquity. See also Frédéric Gros’ postscript to *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (especially 530-1), which discusses the “many misunderstandings” to which Foucault’s language of an “aesthetics of existence” has—understandably—given rise. Indeed, even Foucault’s discussion of Baudelaire in “What is Enlightenment?” is marked by language that suggests that he understands Baudelairean dandyism to involve this sort of rigorous, disciplinary, “sculptural” work. Baudelairean modern man, Foucault says, is subjected to a “discipline more despotic than the most terrible religions.” Modern man does not go off to “discover himself,” but is “compelled” to “face the task of producing himself.” The language is deeply disciplinary and surprisingly ascetic. I am thankful to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting that I pursue this point more.

²⁹ Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 9.

textured differences in practices of self-care, differences which may well disrupt the smooth, “long summer” account he is giving. Thus we might be worried when Foucault, in the second volume of *The History of Sexuality*, says that he intended to show that “nearly the same restrictive, the same prohibitive code” was present “in the fourth century [BCE] and in the moralists and doctors at the beginning of the [Roman empire]” or, later, that “most of the themes of Christian austerity were very clearly present nearly from the beginning [of Greek pagan ethics].”³⁰ Reading such breezy sentences we might ask what has happened to the Foucault who developed in us that Nietzschean hermeneutic of suspicion, that hermeneutic ever so critical of historical narratives that confidently glide over hundreds of years, leveling all difference along the way? We might also ask what has happened to the Foucault who developed in us that Nietzschean genealogical sensibility, the one ever on-watch for the contingent and unintended? Where has he gone?

Porter, then, is well within his rights to reproach Foucault for this untextured approach to “antiquity.” But let us look at how Porter formulates his critique: “...against all of Foucault’s best expectations, his history [the three volumes of the *History of Sexuality*] turns out to be fatally linear: ‘Continuities can be identified,’ [Foucault] writes in the third volume, practically bewildered at what he has discovered—or else produced.”³¹ This is extremely strong language: “against all of [his] best expectations;” “fatally;” “practically bewildered.” And note the final intimation, after the dash that Foucault might as well have just made up the continuity that the three volumes purportedly show.

The charges—first, that the history is “fatally linear” and, second, that Foucault just made up the continuities his work show—prove groundless. To take the first, it just is not true that the three-volume history is “fatally linear.” Foucault, in fact, developed a way of writing the history of the self that is so subtle that to read it as “linear” is to have misunderstood the project. This subtlety, in fact, is already on evidence in the passage cited above, the following sentence to which I had left off: “...what I wanted to do... was to show that you have nearly the same restrictive, the same prohibitive code in the fourth century BC and in the moralists and doctors at the beginning of the [Roman] empire. *But I think the way they integrate those prohibitions is completely different.*”³² So the story is emphatically *not* a story of continuity alone, nor is it a story of rupture. Rather, it is a story of a certain general normative practice (*epimeleia heautou*), which, while in some sense continuous, is articulated in different historical moments in entirely different ways.

Lest Porter object that the italicized sentence alone is unable to save Foucault from the damage wrought by the “long summer” talk above, we should direct Porter to the moments when Foucault unpacks the italicized sentence in tremendous detail. In the widely anthologized article “On the Genealogy of Ethics” (and also, though to a lesser extent, in the second and third volumes of *The History of Sexuality* and *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*) Foucault constructs what we might think of as a “grid of intelligibility” for the practice of *epimeleia heautou*. This grid accounts for both the continuities within the practice of *epimeleia heautou* and the cru-

³⁰ Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress,” 254.

³¹ Porter, “Foucault’s Ascetic Ancients,” 126, identical to Porter, “Foucault’s Antiquity,” 174.

³² *Ibid*, my italics.

cial differences within the practice at any two historical moments. The grid therefore saves Foucault from the “fatally linear” charge, while also making good on my claim above that Foucault has developed an “infinitely subtler” mode of historical writing than Porter credits him with having.

The grid distinguishes four different aspects of the practice of *epimeleia heautou*: first, the “ethical substance;” second, the “mode of subjectivation;” third, the “self-forming activities;” and, fourth, the “telos” of the practice. Each is something of a term-of-art, so I will briefly describe each. The “ethical substance” can be thought of as the “part of ourselves or our behavior which is relevant for ethical judgment.” Foucault says that he tried to show, in the second volume of *The History of Sexuality*, that the ethical substance “relevant in Greek ethics” is “something different from concupiscence, from flesh,” which is the ethical substance relevant in Christian ethics. The “mode of subjectivation” refers to the “way in which people are invited to recognize their moral obligations. Is it for instance, divine law that has been revealed in a text? Is it natural law, a cosmological order, in each case the same for every living being?” Different answers to such questions yield different practices of *epimeleia heautou*. The “self-forming activities” refers to those practices—cognitive, physical, dietetic—by which the subject works on the “ethical substance.” Finally, the “telos” refers to the “kind of being to which we aspire when we behave in a moral way.” Do we, Foucault asks, aspire to be “pure, or immortal, or free, or masters of ourselves” or something else entirely? Again, different answers to this question yield different practices of *epimeleia heautou*.³³

This grid makes the “long summer” talk considerably less worrying. All Foucault means by “long summer” is that we can detect a general commitment to self-care over several centuries. He emphatically does not mean that that commitment is articulated identically over the “long summer.” Between any two historical moments, one or more of the grid’s aspects will differ. Any change in one of the grid’s aspects changes the practice of self-care. This is what allows for the claims of difference; but the grid retains its overall structure as articulating a practice of *epimeleia heautou*—this is what allows for the claims of continuity.

This does not mean that Foucault actually puts the grid to good use in his work. It does mean, though, that Porter’s language of “fatally linear” is out of place. Foucault actually has an argument about *epimeleia heautou*’s place in the “long summer” of Hellenistic and Roman thought. The long summer language does not stand in for an argument. The argument had already been made. Porter merely missed or ignored it. Nor is Foucault is not “practically bewildered by [the continuities] he has discovered,” as if he were so committed to a story about “rupture” that he could not believe that the sources didn’t confirm his intuitions. How could he be bewildered when he shows himself so attentive to them? I leave untouched Porter’s suggestions that Foucault “produced” the continuities.

I have already said that Foucault’s grid does not, somehow, make him immune to the charge that he has misread or misunderstood a particular set of historical practices. Not at all. Indeed, Porter helpfully points the reader to Peter Brown’s much subtler reading of early Christian sexual austerity or Bracht Branham’s much finer reading of Cynic asceticism.³⁴ This

³³ Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress,” 263-6 for the entire grid.

³⁴ See Porter, “Foucault’s Ascetic Ancients,” 129.

sort of criticism is all very much in order, and very well taken. But However, Porter says that he *does not* want to challenge Foucault on historical grounds. He does not, that is, want to do what Brown and Branham rightly do. He wants to challenge the “underlying trajectory of his project, its too often neglected continuist [sic] dimensions, and its teleologies.”³⁵ But this is the completely wrong way to go about criticizing the project, for the very simple fact that Foucault shows himself fully aware of just what Porter thinks he has exposed.³⁶

6.

I have cited Arnold Davidson approvingly and enthusiastically and, in concluding, I want to turn to him once more, this time with the full text of the quote about classicists that began the essay:

Whatever one’s disagreements with Foucault’s interpretation of specific ancient texts, his conceptualization of ethics, the framework within which he placed these interpretations, is as potentially transformative for writing the history of ethics as, to take the strongest comparison I can think of, John Rawls’s *A Theory of Justice* is... for articulating the aims of political philosophy. But this transformative potential has been obscured for philosophy by a way of thinking about and writing the history of ethics that passes over the very domain that Foucault demarcated as ethics... and this potential has been further darkened in the discussions of some classicists who, to give only a partial caricature, have been so taken with tired and tiresome debates about whether Foucault knew enough Greek and Latin to legitimize his readings of the texts of classical and late antiquity that they have lost sight of his most basic aims.³⁷

The full text is important because it makes clear that Davidson’s animus is not, in the first instance, directed against classics. To the contrary, the full text makes clear that he is primarily vexed by *philosophy’s* failure. Classics is secondarily culpable, on Davidson’s lament, in that it made the recognition of the transformative power of Foucault’s work even more difficult to secure.

I said above that there is reason to expect to be optimistic that the posthumous publication of Foucault’s late work on the ancients might to allow classicists to a return to Foucault in a less antagonistic—though not less critical—spirit. I offered two reasons for the optimism: first, the *form* of this posthumously published work is more congenial to what we might call, loosely, classicists’ “methodological temperament;” and, second, the intellectual climate generally is more congenial to Foucault. I pass over the second reason and turn, briefly, to the first. Foucault is not, in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* or *Le courage de la vérité*, working as a philo-

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ See Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 461: “What I have wanted to show in this year’s course is, among other things, the following: that the historical tradition, and so the philosophical tradition... has always privileged the *gnôthi seauton*, self-knowledge, as the guiding thread for all analyses of these problems of the subject, reflexivity, knowledge of the self, etcetera. Now it seems to me that by only considering the *gnôthi seauton* in and for itself alone we are in danger of establishing a false continuity and of installing a factitious history that would display a sort of continuous development of knowledge of the self.”

³⁷ Davidson, “Ethics as ascetics: Foucault, the history of ethics, and ancient thought,” 115-6.

logist. But that seems an unreasonable expectation, and one for which he deserves no reproach. He is, though, working more deliberately and more closely with the texts at the center of his argument—Plato’s *Apology*, Seneca’s *Natural Questions*, or Epictetus’ *Discourses*, to name but three. This is not to suggest that the Foucault did *not* work deliberately or closely with texts in *The History of Sexuality*. It is only to say that his method and manner—the “temperament” of the posthumous works, we might say—is one classicists will find more familiar and, therefore, perhaps more congenial. If he is not working *as a philologist*, he is working, I think, in a way that owes much to—and which can learn more from—philology.

This is immediately apparent in Foucault’s opening remarks about the course’s structure. He intends, he says, to divide the two-hour lectures into two, one-hour sessions. In the first hour he intends to give “a somewhat more... theoretical and general exposition,” while in the second hour to “present something more like a textual analysis.”³⁸ This plan is immediately qualified by Foucault’s lament that not all the students will have the relevant texts, and so the “textual analysis” cannot be extraordinarily detailed. These difficulties are compounded by the fact that Foucault does not abide by the format he himself has proposed. The “theoretical and general exposition” begins to colonize the ground nominally ceded to the philological.

Even though Foucault does not abide by his own strictures, there is a sense in which *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* marks a deep methodological break with earlier work. A comparison of Foucault’s treatment of the *Apology* makes this clear. In the third volume of *The History of Sexuality* we get this very brief remark: “...in the *Apology* it is clearly as a master of the care of the self that Socrates presents himself to his judges. The god has sent him to remind men that they need to concern themselves not with their riches, not with their honor, but with themselves and with their souls.”³⁹ Against this we should set the several pages Foucault spends on the *Apology* in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, where he discusses three different appearances of the *epimeleia heautou* injunction. For each he provides relevant context; quotes the text at length; adduces relevant comparanda (Xenophon and others); and notes, at times, the original Greek.⁴⁰

The original Greek is, in fact, quite important to the argumentative arc of the work as a whole. Foucault is emphatic about locating *epimeleia* within its semantic matrix. The contours of the practice of self-care come into view against a background established not only by other contexts of care—that is to say, other appearances of the word *epimeleia* outside the phrase *epimeleia heautou*—but also by the matrix of practices associated with *meletê*, *meletan*, and other cognates.⁴¹ This, in turn, leads Foucault to an examination of other words with which this semantic set is frequently paired—words like *gymnazein*. The result is a rich linguistic landscape that sets in relief—by comparison to and distinction from other practices—the specific demands of *epimeleia heautou*.

³⁸ Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 1-2.

³⁹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality 3: The Care of the Self*, translated by Michael Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1986), 44. There is one other, equally brief reference to the *Apology* at page 63.

⁴⁰ Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 4-8.

⁴¹ See, for example, Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 84, and especially 355–368.

Again, it is not the work of a philologist, but it is the work of someone sensitive to the texture of the language. It certainly lacks the *ex cathedra* quality of the pronouncements from *The History of Sexuality*. None of this means that Foucault cannot be hasty in the late lectures and, indeed, one of their central deficiencies is the way in which the evidence Foucault adduces is seldom situated in the context of the generic and linguistic conventions that structure the texts. So the question, "Is Foucault a good reader of classical texts?" must be answered with both a 'yes' and a 'no'. Yes, because Foucault does prove genuinely attentive to the texts themselves, in a way that he had not been before, and the results are sparkling. He has clearly and convincingly demonstrated an entirely new way of writing the history of ethics. To continue the example used above, the *Apology*—and, by the extension, the entire Socratic project—now looks to be oriented around entirely different concerns. Famously Socratic questions about, say, the unity of the virtues or the justification of belief, lose their standing as discrete, independent investigations and are shown instead to be part of one comprehensive project—the project of the subject's preparation for truth.

But the 'no' must not be neglected. Foucault seldom situates the evidence in the context of a work's overall project. So, while Foucault most certainly does, as I said above, "provide relevant context" for the evidence marshaled, sometimes this context can be relatively superficial. This is especially prominent in the discussion of *parrhêsia*, which moves swiftly between Greek and Roman material tremendously quickly and, as a result, is very unsatisfying. Take, for example, these remarks: "I reminded you last week that, etymologically, *parrhêsia* is 'telling all.' The *parrhêsia* [sic] tells all... What is basically at stake in *parrhêsia* is what could be called, somewhat impressionistically, the frankness, freedom, and openness that leads one way to say what one has to say, as one wishes to say it, when one wishes to say it, and in the form one thinks is necessary for saying it. The term *parrhêsia* is so bound up with the choice, decision, and attitude of the person speaking that the Latins translated it by precisely, *libertas*. The telling all of *parrhêsia* was rendered by *libertas*: the freedom of the person speaking."⁴² This is all very hasty, and the following pages only compound the problem. They show very little sensitivity to the long, and tremendously vexed standing of the word *libertas* in Roman political discourse. Foucault was surely not unaware of that standing, but for whatever reason it just does not shape the discussion here, and so when I say that *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* reveals a sensitivity to the texture of the language not found, for example, in *Le Souci de Soi*, that verdict cannot stand unqualified.

This is precisely where classicists can themselves bring illumination to Foucault's project. By this I do not mean that they need to police his errors—factual, etymological, or otherwise. Their skills ought to be put in the service of a different sort of project. Classicists can rightly claim an intimacy with the structures of these texts—the governing generic, linguistic, and stylistic conventions—that Foucault can overlook. These conventions are, for classical philologists, the exegetical points of departure, since these conventions of genre, language, and style are essential, not accidental, features of ancient texts. They give a text its structure, its shape and being. Classical philologists, then, have a kind of nearness to a text's archi-

⁴² Ibid, 372.

ture that Foucault lacks. This means that they can offer his investigations a level of productive resistance that other disciplines simply cannot.

At times Foucault almost asks for classicist help. In the course of his short reading of the preface to book four of Seneca's *Natural Questions*, he professes puzzlement at the inclusion of remarks about *libertas* and its opposite, flattery, in a book entitled "On the Nile."⁴³ It is a wonderfully revealing moment—though the work is filled with them—and precisely the sort of moment that presents to classicists the possibility of a productively critical encounter with Foucault. He not only shows himself at a loss to explain the general structure of a text, but seems genuinely eager to be freed from his *aporia*, an *aporia* that classicists, with their knowledge of the text's governing generic structures, are equipped to resolve. A few pages later, still in the context of a discussion of *parrhêsia*, he turns to Philodemus' treatise *Peri parrhêsias* and, quite humbly, professes to be deeply indebted to Gigante's work on the text. (He says he has been "especially guided" by Gigante's commentary).⁴⁴ The critical resources of philology are, then, precisely the resources with which Foucault wants his own project supplemented. Foucault not only seems to know that his project lacks a level of philological sophistication. He seems to regret it.

Indeed, that is why it is important to reiterate that Davidson's lament is directed primarily against ancient philosophers and not classicists. They—ancient philosophers, that is—have failed to recognize Foucault's work as a contribution to the study of ethics. As Davidson says, their "way of thinking about and writing the history of ethics passes over the very domain that Foucault demarcated as ethics." The same cannot be said of classicists. It is not as if they, like their philosophical colleagues, require some wholesale revision of what is to count as ethical. Indeed, a good number of them have long ago shown themselves innocent of Davidson's charge. The professional moniker "classicist" disguises a deeply heterogeneous field, parts of which have long since been open to what Davidson calls the "transformative" potential of Foucault's work.⁴⁵ Even these parts of the field have much to learn from the late lectures, since these lectures pursue their investigation of antiquity much more rigorously.

Whether classicists do come to find the late Foucault congenial, we can at the very least reaffirm Davidson's desire that Foucault's most basic aims not be obscured. The central argument of this piece has been that Porter has obscured those aims. And, strangely, that obscuring has not come, like the early antagonism, in the wake of philological recriminations, but

⁴³ Ibid, 376.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 387.

⁴⁵ I pursue these disciplinary questions in considerably more detail in the forthcoming "Foucault & Classical Studies: Productive Resistance and the Late Lectures," and warmly thank an anonymous reviewer for pressing me to consider the significance of the discipline's heterogeneity and, what's more, the way in which that heterogeneity conditioned Foucault's varied, uneven reception.

rather in the wake of a more basic misunderstanding. What caused that more basic misunderstanding is difficult to identify securely. Perhaps Porter's dislike of Foucault's alleged epigones has influenced his verdict on Foucault himself. His articles do lean heavily on these alleged epigones, though quote them almost not at all. Indeed, Porter quotes Foucault only sparingly. Porter mentions only six very early pages—with only one citation of any length—from the French edition of *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, which runs to well over five hundred pages. I also do not think the misunderstanding can be sourced to these pages themselves, since they are ruthlessly—at times repetitively—clear. This makes it distressing that Porter's articles miss the central problematic of the work—the subject's preparation for truth. I hope to have shown the contours of that problematic, and the contours of what I called Foucault's "infinitely subtler" method for writing the history of ethics, both of which present a Foucault very much worthy of classicists' scrupulous attention.

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